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ABSTRACT

This report presents information on the characteristics of parents incarcerated in state or federal prisons. Data were obtained from personal interviews conducted for the 1997 Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities. Findings indicated that a majority of state and federal prisoners were the parents of at least one minor child. Prior to incarceration, 44 percent of fathers and 64 percent of mothers lived with their children. Nearly half of incarcerated parents were black; about a quarter were white. Parents in state prison were younger than those in federal prison. Most parents in state (70 percent) and federal (55 percent) prisons lacked a high school diploma. Forty percent of fathers and 60 percent of mothers in state prison had at least weekly contact with their children. In state prisons, mothers consistently reported more frequent contact with their children than fathers. In federal prisons, mothers and fathers had more similar levels of contact with their children. A majority of incarcerated parents were violent offenders or drug traffickers. A majority of parents in state prison used drugs in the month before their offense. One-third of mothers in state prison committed their crime to obtain drugs or money for drugs. The report also presents information on parents' marital status, expected time served, previous drug and alcohol use, prior convictions and incarcerations, sex differences in type of offenses, mental illness, and previous homelessness. The report's appendix describes the methodology and presents information on the standard errors for selected characteristics of state and federal prisoners with minor children. (KB)

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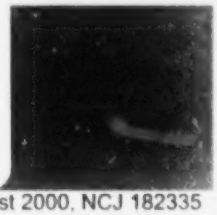

Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report

August 2000, NCJ 182335

ED 448 903

Incarcerated Parents and Their Children

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In 1999 State and Federal prisons held an estimated 721,500 parents of minor children. A majority of State (55%) and Federal (63%) prisoners reported having a child under the age of 18. Forty-six percent of the parents reported living with their children prior to admission. As a result, there were an estimated 336,300 U.S. households with minor children affected by the imprisonment of a resident parent.

Parents held in U.S prisons had an estimated 1,498,800 minor children in 1999, an increase of over 500,000 since 1991. Of the Nation's 72 million minor children, 2.1% had a parent in State or Federal prison in 1999.

A majority of parents in State prison were violent offenders (44%) or drug traffickers (13%), and 77% had a prior conviction. Nearly 60% of parents in State prison reported using drugs in the month before their offense, and 25% reported a history of alcohol dependence. About 14% of parents reported a mental illness, and 70% did not have a high school diploma.

This report is the latest in a series based on the 1997 Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities. Other BJS Special Reports in this series have addressed substance abuse and treatment, mental health, women and juvenile offenders, and inmates' military service.

Highlights

In 1999 an estimated 721,500 State and Federal prisoners were parents to 1,498,800 children under age 18

Minor children	Percent of prisoners, 1997 State	Federal
Any	55.4%	63.0%
1	23.8	24.0
2	15.8	18.5
3 or more	15.8	20.5
None	44.6%	37.0%
Estimated number of minor children, 1999	1,324,900	173,900

- Since 1991 the number of minor children with a parent in State or Federal prison rose by over 500,000; from 936,500 to 1,498,800 in 1999.
- The percentage of State and Federal prisoners with minor children (56%) changed little since 1991 (57%).
- 22% of all minor children with a parent in prison were under 5 years old.

Prior to admission, less than half of the parents in State prison reported living with their children — 44% of fathers, 64% of mothers

	Percent of State inmate parents, 1997 Male	Female
Lived with children prior to admission	43.8%	64.3%
Current caregiver*		
Child's other parent	89.6%	28.0%
Child's grandparent	13.3	52.9
Other relative	4.9	25.7
Foster home/agency	1.8	9.6
Friends/other	4.9	10.4

*Some prisoners had children in different homes.

- About 46% of parents in prison lived with their children prior to admission.
- About 90% of fathers in State prison said that at least one of their children now lived with their mother; 28% of mothers said the father was the child's current caregiver.
- 10% of mothers and 2% of fathers in State prison reported a child now living in a foster home or agency.

Nearly 2 in 3 State prisoners reported at least monthly contact with their children by phone, mail, or personal visits

Type of contact	Percent of State inmate parents reporting monthly contact with their children, 1997 Male	Female
Any	62.4%	78.4%
Phone	42.0%	53.6%
Mail	49.9	65.8
Visits	21.0	23.8

- 40% of fathers and 60% of mothers in State prison reported weekly contact with their children.
- A majority of both fathers (57%) and mothers (54%) in State prison reported never having a personal visit with their children since admission.
- Over 60% of parents in State prison reported being held over 100 miles from their last place of residence.

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Over half of both State and Federal prisoners reported having a child under age 18

When interviewed during the 1997 Surveys of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, a majority of prisoners said that they were the parent of at least one child under age 18 (table 1). Fifty-five percent of State prisoners and 63% of Federal prisoners reported having a minor child. Among State prisoners, women (65%) were more likely than men (55%) to have minor children. In Federal prisons, similar percentages of men (63%) and women (59%) had a minor child.

Thirty-two percent of all prisoners said that they had multiple minor children. About 24% of both State and Federal prisoners reported one minor child, but Federal inmates (39%) were more likely than State inmates (32%) to report multiple children. Among State prisoners, 45% of women had multiple children compared to 31% of men.

Twenty-two percent of all minor children with a parent in prison were under age 5. The majority (58%) of the minor children reported by State and Federal inmates were less than 10 years old, and the average age of these children was 8 years old.

Age	Percent of minor children of parents in State or Federal prison, 1997
Less than 1 year	2.1%
1-4 years	20.4
5-9 years	35.1
10-14 years	28.0
15-17 years	14.5
Mean	8 years

State and Federal prisons held an estimated 721,500 parents of minor children in 1999

At yearend 1999 there were 1,284,894 prisoners in the custody of State and Federal prisons, including an estimated 721,500 parents with minor children (table 2). Imprisoned parents were predominantly male (93%) and held in State prisons (89%). In 1999 State and Federal prisons held an estimated 667,900 fathers and 53,600 mothers of minor children.

Since 1991 the custody population of State and Federal prisons grew by over 490,000 inmates, an increase of 62%. As a result, the number of parents in prison also grew sharply — by over 250,000 — from the 452,500 held in State and Federal prison in 1991.

1.5 million children in the U.S. had a parent in prison in 1999 — up by more than 500,000 since 1991

The number of children with a parent in prison also rose dramatically during the 1990's. In 1991, there were an estimated 936,500 minor children with a parent in State or Federal prison. By yearend 1999, this number had risen by more than a half-million to an estimated 1,498,800 minor children.

Of the Nation's 72.3 million minor children in 1999, 2.1% had a parent in State or Federal prison. Black children (7.0%) were nearly 9 times more likely to have a parent in prison than white children (0.8%). Hispanic children (2.6%) were 3 times as likely as white children to have an inmate parent.

	Minor children in the U.S. resident population with a parent in prison, 1999	
	Number	Percent
U.S. total*	1,498,800	2.1%
White	384,500	0.8%
Black	767,200	7.0
Hispanic	301,600	2.6

Note: Children were assumed to have the same race/ethnicity as the incarcerated parent.
*Includes children of other races.

At yearend 1999 an estimated 1,372,700 minor children had a father in State or Federal prison, while another 126,100 children had a mother in prison. Since 1990 the number of all female prisoners has grown faster (106%) than that of male prisoners (75%). As a result, the number of children with a mother in prison nearly doubled (up 98%) since 1991, while the number of children with a father in prison grew by 58% during this period.

Table 1. Percent of State and Federal prisoners with minor children, by gender, 1997

	Percent of prisoners, 1997					
	State			Federal		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Have minor children (under age 18)						
No	44.6%	45.3%	34.7%	37.0%	36.6%	41.2%
Yes	55.4	54.7	65.3	63.0	63.4	58.8
Number of minor children						
1	23.8%	24.0%	20.5%	24.0%	24.0%	24.5%
2	15.8	15.6	18.7	18.5	18.7	17.1
3	8.7	8.4	13.7	11.1	11.3	9.7
4	4.1	3.9	7.3	5.0	5.1	4.1
5	1.7	1.6	3.6	2.3	2.2	2.7
6 or more	1.3	1.3	1.6	2.1	2.2	0.7

Table 2. Estimated number of State and Federal prisoners with minor children, by gender, 1999

	State prisoners			Federal prisoners		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Number of parents						
1999	642,300	593,800	48,500	79,200	74,100	5,100
1991	413,100	386,500	26,600	39,400	36,500	2,900
Number of minor children						
1999	1,324,900	1,209,400	115,500	173,900	163,300	10,600
1991	852,300	794,500	57,800	84,200	78,300	5,900

Note: Numbers are estimates based on responses to the 1991 and 1997 Surveys of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, and custody counts from the National Prisoners Statistics program.

Nearly half of all imprisoned parents were black; about a quarter were white

Among both State and Federal prisoners with minor children, blacks comprised the largest racial/ethnic group (table 3). In State prisons, 49% of parents were black, 29% white, and 19% Hispanic. Among nonparent State prisoners, the percentage of blacks (43%) and Hispanics (15%) were slightly lower, but the percentage of whites was higher (39%).

Blacks (44%) were the largest racial/ethnic group among parents in Federal prison, followed by Hispanics (30%) and whites (22%). The racial distribution was almost reversed among Federal prisoners without minor children. Whites made up 43% of nonparent inmates, while blacks accounted for 27% of nonparents. Nonparents in Federal prison were also less likely to be Hispanic (23%).

Parents in State prison were slightly younger than those in Federal prison. Parents in State prison (16%) were about twice as likely as those in Federal prison (8%) to be age 24 or younger. Overall, the median age of parents in State prison was 32 years old, compared to 35 years old among parents in Federal prison. In State prison, the median age of nonparents was similar (33 years) to that of parents. In Federal prison, the median age of nonparents (40 years) was 5 years greater than that of prisoners with minor children.

Half of the parents in State prison were never married

Of the parents in State prison, 23% said that they were currently married, 28% were divorced or separated, and 48% said that they had never been married. In comparison, nonparents in State prison were less than half as likely to be currently married (9%), and 69% said that they had never married.

While parents in Federal prison (36%) were more likely than those in State prison to be married, a similar percentage (25%) were either divorced or separated. Thirty-eight percent of parents in Federal prison said that they had never been married, compared to 49% of the nonparents.

A majority of parents in both State (70%) and Federal (55%) prison reported that they did not have a high school diploma. Similar percentages of parents in State (16%) and Federal (20%) prison graduated high school, but college attendance was nearly twice as high among parents in Federal prison (25% compared to 13% in State prisons). About 12% of parents in both State and Federal prison said that they had not been educated past the eighth grade. Overall, nonparents in both State and Federal prison reported similar levels of education as inmate parents.

Table 3. Selected characteristics of State or Federal prisoners, by whether the inmates were parents of minor children, 1997

	Percent of prisoners, 1997			
	State		Federal	
	Parents	Nonparents	Parents	Nonparents
Gender				
Male	92.6%	95.2%	93.2%	91.9%
Female	7.4	4.8	6.8	8.1
Race/Hispanic origin				
White non-Hispanic	28.9%	38.9%	21.9%	43.4%
Black non-Hispanic	49.4	42.8	44.0	27.0
Hispanic	18.9	14.5	30.0	22.9
Other	2.8	3.8	4.0	6.7
Age				
24 or younger	15.8%	25.0%	7.8%	11.3%
25-34	44.9	30.1	41.8	27.9
35-44	32.1	26.0	35.1	23.0
45-54	6.6	13.3	12.8	22.1
55 or older	0.6	5.6	2.5	15.8
Median	32 yr	33 yr	35 yr	40 yr
Marital status				
Married	23.0%	8.7%	35.8%	21.2%
Widowed	1.6	2.2	1.6	1.8
Divorced	20.5	16.1	19.0	22.9
Separated	7.2	3.9	6.0	5.3
Never married	47.7	69.2	37.6	48.8
Education completed				
8th grade or less	12.7%	15.5%	11.5%	11.9%
Some high school	27.1	23.6	16.7	10.7
GED	30.6	32.6	27.0	26.5
High school graduate	16.1	14.9	19.8	20.8
Some college or more	13.4	13.4	25.0	30.1

Table 4. Percent of inmate parents in State or Federal prison who lived with their minor children at time of admission, by gender, 1997

	Percent of inmate parents, 1997					
	State			Federal		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Lived with children at time of admission	45.3%	43.8%	64.3%	57.2%	55.2%	84.0%
Child's current caregiver[a]						
Other parent of child	85.0%	89.6%	28.0%	87.6%	91.7%	30.7%
Grandparent of child	16.3	13.3	52.9	12.2	9.8	44.9
Other relatives	6.4	4.9	25.7	6.2	4.2	33.9
Foster home or agency	2.4	1.8	9.6	1.3	1.1	3.2
Friends, others[b]	5.3	4.9	10.4	6.8	6.4	11.9

[a]Detail may add to more than 100% because some prisoners had multiple children living with multiple caregivers.
[b]Includes cases where parent reported that the child now lived alone.

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Fewer than half of the parents in State prison lived with their minor children prior to incarceration

Prior to their admission, 46% of all imprisoned parents lived with any of their minor children (table 4). Among parents in State prison, 45% said that they lived with at least one of their minor children compared to 57% of parents in Federal prison.

Mothers were more likely than fathers to report living with their children prior to admission. About 64% of mothers in State prison and 84% of those in Federal prison reported living with their minor children prior to admission, compared to 44% and 55% of fathers, respectively.

Because most inmate parents did not live with their children prior to incarceration, the number of households with children affected by the imprisonment of a resident parent is lower than the total number of parents in prison. At yearend 1999 an estimated 336,300 U.S. households with minor children had a resident parent in State or Federal prison. A total of 300,900 U.S. households with minor children were missing a resident father in prison, and resident mothers were missing from 35,400 households.

	Estimated households with minor children affected by the imprisonment of a resident parent, 1999
Total	336,300
State prison	291,000
Fathers	259,900
Mothers	31,100
Federal prison	45,300
Fathers	41,000
Mothers	4,300

Fathers cite child's mother as the current caregiver; mothers cite child's grandparents, other relatives

When asked who is currently caring for their minor children, over 80% of inmate parents said that their child was now living with the child's other parent. About 20% of parents cited grandparents and other relatives as caregivers, and 2% had a child in a foster home, agency, or institution.

Mothers and fathers in prison differed sharply in their responses to questions about their children's current caregivers. Ninety percent of the fathers in State prison reported that at least one of their children was in the care of the child's mother, compared to 28% of mothers who reported that one of their children was in the care of the child's father.

Mothers in State prison most often identified the child's grandparent (53%) or other relatives (26%) as the current caregiver. The percentage of fathers in State prison who said that they had a minor child in the care of either grandparents (13%) or other relatives (5%) was much smaller. Mothers in State prison (10%) were also more likely than fathers (2%) to report that their children were in the care of a foster home, agency, or institution.

Mothers and fathers in Federal prison also provided differing reports about their children's current caregivers. Nearly all fathers in Federal prison (92%) said that they had a minor child in the care of the child's mother, compared to 31% of mothers who reported the child's father as the current caregiver. As with State inmates, a greater share of mothers than fathers in Federal prison said that a child was in the care of grandparents (45% compared to 10%) or other relatives (34% compared to 4%).

One-third of mothers in prison had been living alone with their children in the month before arrest

In the month prior to their current arrest, the households of most parents in prison did not include their children (table 5). Thirty-seven percent of parents in State prison said that they lived with any of their minor children in the month before their arrest. The parents who had lived with their children were split between those who had lived with both a spouse and the child (20%) and those who were the only parent living with the child (18%). Among parents in Federal prison, a higher percentage of parents (49%) reported living with their children in the month before arrest, and a higher percentage (32%) came from two-parent households.

Mothers in both State (58%) and Federal (73%) prisons were more likely than fathers (36% and 47%, respectively) to report living with their children prior to arrest. Mothers (46% of State, 51% of Federal) were also more likely than fathers (15% and 14%, respectively) to have been the only parent living with the children in the month before their arrest. Thirty-one percent of the mothers in prison had been living alone with their children compared to 4% of fathers.

Table 5. Households of inmate parents in State or Federal prison, by gender, 1997

Prisoner's household in the month before arrest	Percent of inmate parents, 1997					
	State			Federal		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Lived with their children	37.3%	35.6%	58.5%	49.0%	47.2%	73.4%
In two-parent household[a]	19.6%	20.2%	12.5%	32.2%	32.9%	22.1%
Parents and children only	18.2	18.7	11.7	29.4	30.1	19.6
With other relatives[b]	1.2	1.3	0.7	2.0	2.1	1.2
With non-relatives only	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.8	0.7	1.3
In single-parent household	17.7%	15.4%	46.0%	16.8%	14.3%	51.3%
Parent and children only	5.9	3.9	30.9	6.3	4.2	34.8
With other relatives[b]	1.3	1.0	4.3	0.7	0.4	4.9
With non-relatives only	10.5	10.5	10.8	9.8	9.7	11.6
Did not live with their children	62.7%	64.4%	41.5%	51.0%	52.8%	26.6%

[a]Two-parent households are those in which the prisoner lived with both their child(ren) and a spouse.
[b]Includes the prisoners' step-parents, stepchildren, stepbrothers, and stepsisters.

40% of fathers and 60% of mothers in State prison had at least weekly contact with their children

Most parents in both State (80%) and Federal (93%) prison reported having some contact with their children since their admission, either by telephone, mail, or personal visits (table 6). Among State inmates, 69% reported exchanging letters with their children, 58% had spoken with their children over the telephone, and 43% had received a personal visit since admission. Higher percentages of parents in Federal prison reported all types of contact, with telephone calls and letters each reported by 84% of parents and personal visits reported by 56% of parents.

In State prisons, mothers consistently reported more frequent contact with their children than fathers. Mothers (78%) were more likely than fathers (62%) to report some type of monthly contact with their children, and 60% of mothers reported at least weekly contact compared to 40% of fathers. Nearly 40% of mothers in State prison said that they spoke to their children by telephone at least once a week, and 45% reported weekly mail contact with their children. In comparison, fathers reported weekly contact by telephone (25%) or mail (27%) at lower rates.

However, the frequency of personal visits did not vary by gender. Similar percentages of both mothers (24%) and fathers (21%) in State prison reported at least monthly visits from their children. A majority of both mothers (54%) and fathers (57%) had never been visited by their children since entering prison.

Among Federal inmates, mothers and fathers had more similar levels of contact with their children. About 70% of mothers and 60% of fathers had some type of weekly contact with their children. Among mothers in Federal prison, 56% reported weekly telephone calls and 45% reported weekly mail contact, compared to 49% and 34% of fathers, respectively. Similar percentages of mothers (20%) and fathers (23%) reported monthly visits, and just over 40% of both had never been visited since admission.

Table 6. Frequency of telephone, mail, and personal contacts with children by parents in State or Federal prison, 1997

Frequency and type of contact with children	Percent of inmate parents, 1997					
	State			Federal		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Any type of contact						
Daily or almost daily	10.1%	9.5%	17.8%	15.1%	14.6%	21.1%
At least once a week	31.2	30.3	42.4	43.7	43.4	48.5
At least once a month	22.2	22.6	18.0	23.8	23.9	22.0
Less than once a month	16.1	16.6	9.7	10.0	10.3	5.0
Never	20.4	21.1	12.2	7.5	7.8	3.3
Telephone						
Daily or almost daily	6.6%	6.2%	11.3%	13.0%	12.8%	15.0%
At least once a week	19.8	19.2	27.0	36.3	35.9	41.2
At least once a month	16.5	16.6	15.3	23.2	23.1	24.9
Less than once a month	15.4	15.5	13.8	11.3	11.4	9.2
Never	41.8	42.5	32.6	16.2	16.7	9.7
Mail						
Daily or almost daily	4.8%	4.4%	9.6%	4.3%	3.9%	9.5%
At least once a week	23.2	22.2	35.6	30.4	30.0	35.9
At least once a month	23.1	23.3	20.6	30.4	30.5	27.8
Less than once a month	18.2	18.6	13.2	18.9	19.2	14.5
Never	30.8	31.6	21.0	16.1	16.4	12.3
Personal visits						
Daily or almost daily	0.8%	0.7%	1.1%	0.4%	0.3%	0.9%
At least once a week	6.6	6.5	8.0	7.1	7.1	6.6
At least once a month	13.9	13.8	14.7	15.1	15.3	12.0
Less than once a month	22.2	22.2	22.1	33.4	33.0	38.5
Never	56.6	56.8	54.1	44.1	44.2	42.0

Over 60% of parents in State prison were held more than 100 miles from their last place of residence

A majority of parents in both State (62%) and Federal (84%) prison were held more than 100 miles from their last place of residence. However, parents in State prison (17%) were twice as likely as those in Federal prison (7%) to be housed within 50 miles of their last residence. Parents in State facilities (11%) were also less likely than those in Federal prison (43%) to be held over 500 miles from their last household.

Distance of prison from last place of residence	Percent of inmate parents, 1997	
	State	Federal
Less than 50 miles	17.4%	7.5%
50-100 miles	20.7	8.5
101-500 miles	51.2	40.7
More than 500 miles	10.7	43.3

A majority of parents in prison were violent offenders or drug traffickers

In both State (57%) and Federal (61%) prison, a majority of the parents were sentenced for either violent offenses, such as homicide, sexual assault, and robbery, or drug trafficking activities (table 7). Violent offenses (44%) were the most common type of crime for which parents were serving time in State prison, while 67% of the parents in Federal prison were drug offenders.

Among State prisoners, parents (44%) were less likely than nonparents (51%) to be violent offenders. Parents in State prison were more likely to be serving a sentence for drug offenses (24%) than nonparents (17%).

Current offense	Percent of State prisoners, 1997	
	Parents	Nonparents
Violent	43.9%	51.1%
Property	21.6	22.5
Drug	23.9	16.7
Public-order	10.3	9.3

Table 7. Current offense of inmate parents in State or Federal prison, by gender, 1997

Current offense	Percent of inmate parents, 1997					
	State			Federal		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Violent offenses	43.9%	45.4%	26.0%	11.9%	12.3%	6.5%
Homicide[a]	10.9	11.1	8.6	1.2	1.2	1.3
Sexual assault[b]	8.3	8.8	1.7	0.7	0.8	0.1
Robbery	13.2	13.8	6.4	7.8	8.1	3.4
Assault	9.7	9.9	7.2	1.3	1.3	1.3
Other violent	1.8	1.8	2.1	0.9	0.9	0.4
Property offenses	21.6%	21.1%	28.3%	5.3%	4.9%	10.3%
Burglary	10.2	10.6	5.4	0.3	0.3	0.1
Larceny	4.6	4.3	8.5	0.4	0.4	0.3
Motor vehicle theft	1.5	1.6	1.2	0.2	0.3	0.0
Fraud	2.8	2.1	11.3	3.7	3.3	8.9
Stolen property	1.6	1.7	1.3	0.4	0.4	0.6
Other property	0.9	0.9	0.6	0.3	0.3	0.3
Drug offenses	23.9%	23.0%	35.1%	67.2%	66.7%	73.9%
Possession	10.1	9.7	14.8	12.9	13.1	9.7
Trafficking	13.1	12.7	19.0	48.9	48.0	61.0
Other drug	0.7	0.6	1.3	5.4	5.6	3.2
Public-order offenses	10.3%	10.3%	10.4%	14.6%	15.1%	7.9%
Weapons	2.7	2.8	0.9	6.9	7.3	1.1
Other public-order	7.6	7.5	9.5	7.8	7.9	6.7
Other/unspecified	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	1.0%	0.9%	1.5%

[a]Includes murder and manslaughter.
[b]Includes rape and other sexual assaults.

Table 8. Maximum sentence length and time to be served until release of State and Federal prisoners with minor children, by gender, 1997

	Percent of inmate parents, 1997					
	State			Federal		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Maximum sentence length						
Less than 12 months	3.1%	2.8%	7.3%	2.3%	2.1%	5.1%
12-35 months	13.1	12.5	20.3	10.6	9.5	26.3
36-59 months	13.2	12.7	19.9	13.2	13.0	16.2
60-119 months	22.5	22.4	23.2	30.0	30.6	22.4
120-179 months	14.0	14.3	10.7	19.6	19.7	18.1
180-239 months	8.9	9.1	6.3	9.0	9.2	5.2
240+ months	19.1	19.9	9.4	12.2	12.7	5.8
Life/death	6.1	6.3	2.8	3.1	3.3	0.7
Mean[a]	146 mo	150 mo	94 mo	121 mo	124 mo	83 mo
Estimated total time to be served on current sentence[b]						
Less than 24 months	19.3%	17.9%	37.5%	8.5%	7.2%	26.2%
24-47 months	23.1	22.9	24.9	15.0	14.5	22.9
48-71 months	15.7	15.9	14.0	18.1	18.1	17.2
72-119 months	16.6	17.2	8.9	25.1	25.6	17.8
120-179 months	8.7	9.1	3.6	14.9	15.4	8.3
180-239 months	4.0	4.2	1.5	7.1	7.4	3.2
240+ months	5.3	5.6	2.1	6.9	7.3	2.2
No release expected	2.1	2.2	1.0	1.2	1.3	0.5
Do not know	5.1	5.0	6.5	3.2	3.3	1.8
Mean[c]	80 mo	82 mo	49 mo	103 mo	105 mo	66 mo

[a]Excludes sentences to life or death.
[b]Based on time served when interviewed plus time to be served until the expected date of release.
[c]Excludes inmates who do not expect to be released.

Mothers and fathers were serving time in State prison for different types of criminal offenses. Forty-five percent of fathers in State prison were violent offenders, compared to 26% of mothers. Fathers in State prison (14%) were more likely than mothers (6%) to be convicted of robbery. Mothers were more likely to be sentenced for drug offenses (35% compared to 23% of fathers) and fraud (11% and 2%).

The current offenses of mothers and fathers in Federal prison were more similar than those of State inmates. Two-thirds of fathers and three-quarters of mothers in Federal prison were convicted of drug offenses. The percentage of violent offenders among both fathers (12%) and mothers (6%) was much lower than in State prison, while 5% of fathers and 10% of mothers were property offenders.

On average, parents expected to serve 80 months in State prison and 103 months in Federal prison

Due to the large percentage convicted of violent offenses and drug trafficking, parents reported lengthy average sentences — over 12 years (146 months) in State prison and 10 years (121 months) in Federal prison (table 8). Over 40% of the parents in both State (48%) and Federal (44%) prison reported sentences of at least 10 years, including those sentenced to life in prison or death (6% of State and 3% of Federal).

Given their higher percentage of violent offenders, fathers in State prison (150 months) reported sentences that averaged almost 5 years longer than those of mothers (94 months). Forty-eight percent of the mothers in State prison reported sentences of less than 5 years compared to 15% of fathers. Fathers in Federal facilities also reported a longer average sentence (124 months) than mothers (83 months). Mothers in Federal prison (48%) were also about twice as likely as fathers (25%) to report sentences of less than 5 years.

On average parents in State prison expected to serve a total of 80 months prior to their release (55% of the mean sentence length). Fathers (82 months) expected to serve nearly 3 years more than mothers (49 months). In State prison 18% of parents said that they expected to serve at least 10 years before release. Two percent of parents never expected to be released; 5% did not know their release date.

Despite reporting shorter sentences than parents in State prison, parents in Federal facilities expected to serve an average total of 103 months (85% of the mean sentence length). Fathers in Federal prison (105 months) expected to serve about 3 years longer than mothers (66 months). About 30% of parents in Federal prison expected to serve at least 10 years. Less than 5% of parents in Federal prison either never expected to be released (1%) or did not know their release date (3%).

Over 75% of parents in State prison reported a prior conviction; 56% had been incarcerated

At the time of their current arrest, 49% of the parents in State prison were on some type of conditional release from custody, such as probation or parole supervision in the community (table 9). Of the parents in State prison, 25% were on parole and 24% were serving a sentence to probation supervision at the time of arrest.

Over three-quarters of parents in State prison reported a prior sentence to incarceration or probation, while the remainder said that they were first-time offenders. Almost half (46%) of parents in State prison were violent recidivists (repeat offenders with either a current or past violent offense). Most parents in State prison (60%) had served multiple prior sentences.

Among State prison inmates the criminal histories of parents and nonparents did not differ appreciably. At arrest for their current offense, about 45% of the nonparents had a criminal justice status and 74% had a prior conviction.

Criminal history	Percent of State prisoners, 1997	
	Parents	Nonparents
Had a criminal justice status at time of arrest	49.1%	45.1%
Had prior sentence to probation or incarceration	77.2%	74.0%

Overall, fathers in State prison reported more serious criminal histories than mothers. Fathers (25%) were more likely than mothers (19%) to have been arrested while on parole release from a prior prison term. First-time offenders made up a smaller share of fathers in State prison (22% compared to 35% of mothers), and fathers (48%) were also twice as likely as mothers (23%) to be violent recidivists. In addition, 44% of fathers reported at least three prior convictions compared to 32% of mothers.

Parents in Federal prison (27%) were almost half as likely as those in State prison (49%) to report a criminal justice status at time of arrest, and less likely to report a prior conviction (62% compared to 77%). As in State prison, fathers in Federal facilities (65%) were more likely to be recidivists than mothers (34%), particularly violent recidivists (23% of fathers, 6% of mothers). The percentage of fathers (32%) reporting at least three prior sentences was nearly triple that of mothers (11%).

A majority of parents in State prison used drugs in the month before their offense

More than 4 in 5 parents (85%) in State prison reported some type of past drug use, and a majority (58%) said that they were using drugs in the month before their current offense (table 10). Nonparents in State prison reported slightly lower levels of prior drug use.

Prior drug use	Percent of State prisoners, 1997	
	Parents	Nonparents
Ever	85.4%	80.3%
In month before offense	58.1	54.9
At the time of the offense	33.6	31.5

Parents in State prison most commonly reported using marijuana (39%) and cocaine-based drugs (27%), including crack, in the month before their crimes, followed by heroin and other opiates (10%), stimulants (9%), depressants (5%), hallucinogens (3%), and inhalants (1%).

Table 9. Criminal histories of State and Federal prisoners with minor children, by gender, 1997

	Percent of inmate parents, 1997					
	State			Federal		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Status at time of current arrest						
None	50.9%	51.5%	44.0%	73.0%	72.2%	83.9%
Status	49.1	48.5	56.0	27.0	27.8	16.1
On parole	24.8	25.2	18.6	12.7	13.4	2.8
On probation	23.7	22.6	37.0	14.2	14.3	12.5
Escaped from custody	0.6	0.7	0.5	0.2	0.1	0.8
Criminal history						
None	22.8%	21.9%	34.7%	37.5%	35.4%	66.3%
Priors	77.2	78.1	65.3	62.5	64.6	33.7
Violent recidivists[a]	46.1	48.0	23.2	22.2	23.4	5.6
Drug recidivists only	3.7	3.6	6.1	11.4	11.8	6.6
Other recidivists[b]	27.3	26.6	36.0	28.8	29.4	21.3
Number of prior probation/ incarceration sentences						
0	22.8%	21.9%	34.7%	37.5%	35.4%	66.3%
1	16.8	16.7	18.2	18.1	18.4	14.7
2	16.9	17.0	15.2	13.6	14.0	8.3
3-5	24.8	25.2	19.7	20.9	21.8	8.2
6-10	12.6	13.0	7.6	7.6	8.0	2.1
11 or more	6.1	6.3	4.6	2.2	2.3	0.3

[a]Recidivists with at least one current or past violent offense.
[b]Includes recidivists with unknown offense types.

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A third of the parents in State prison reported committing their current offense while under the influence of drugs. Parents were most likely to report the influence of cocaine-based drugs (16%) and marijuana (15%) while committing their crime. About equal percentages of parents in State prison reported the use of opiates (6%) and stimulants (5%) at the time of their offense, while 2% used depressants or hallucinogens.

1 in 3 mothers in State prison committed their crime to get drugs or money for drugs

Mothers in State prison reported more serious drug use histories than fathers. Mothers in State prison (65%) were more likely than fathers (58%) to report drug use in the month before their offense, particularly the use of cocaine or crack (45% of mothers compared to 26% of fathers). Mothers (43%) were also more likely than fathers (33%) to report the influence of drugs in their current offense. Mothers were about twice as likely to have committed their crimes while under the influence of cocaine-based drugs (28%) or opiates (11%) as fathers (15% and 5%, respectively).

In addition, 32% of mothers in State prison reported committing their crime to get drugs or money for drugs, compared to 19% of fathers. Prior intravenous drug use was also reported more commonly by mothers (29%) than fathers (19%).

	Percent of inmate parents in State prison who reported —	
	Male	Female
Committing offense to get money for drugs	18.5%	32.2%
Ever using intravenous drugs	19.0%	29.2%

While reports of prior drug use were lower among parents in Federal prison, 3 in 4 had used drugs and nearly half used drugs in the month before their offense. Twenty-three percent of parents in Federal prison were under the influence of drugs when committing their offense. Aside from marijuana use (higher among fathers), mothers and fathers in Federal prison reported similar drug use histories.

Over a third of parents in State prison committed their offense while under the influence of alcohol

Parents in State prison were more likely to report being under the influence of alcohol (37%) than drugs (34%) while committing their current offense (table 11). According to the CAGE diagnostic instrument, 25% of the parents in State prison reported experiences that are consistent with a history of alcohol dependence (for details on the CAGE instrument, see *Methodology*). Overall, parents and nonparents in State prison did not differ in their reports of prior alcohol abuse.

	Percent of State prisoners, 1997	
Prior alcohol abuse	Parents	Nonparents
Alcohol dependent	25.1%	23.7%
Under influence of alcohol at time of offense	36.7%	37.8%

Parents in State prison also reported engaging in troubled behaviors associated with prior alcohol abuse. About 48% of parents said that they had driven drunk in the past, 42% reported arguments with family members and friends while drinking, and 39% had alcohol-related physical fights.

Table 10. Drug use of inmate parents in State or Federal prison, by gender, 1997

	Percent of inmate parents who reported —								
	Ever using drugs			Using drugs in the month before the offense			Using drugs at the time of the offense		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
State prisoners, 1997									
Any drug[a]	85.4%	85.4%	86.3%	58.1%	57.5%	65.3%	33.6%	32.9%	42.5%
Marijuana/hashish	79.0	79.8	69.4	39.3	40.3	27.5	15.2	15.7	8.8
Cocaine/crack	53.3	52.2	67.2	27.1	25.7	44.6	16.0	15.0	28.3
Heroin/opiates	25.3	24.8	31.3	9.7	9.2	16.0	5.6	5.2	10.7
Depressants[b]	23.9	23.7	25.9	5.1	4.9	7.1	1.8	1.8	2.3
Stimulants[c]	28.6	28.4	30.7	9.2	9.1	10.5	4.6	4.6	5.3
Hallucinogens[d]	28.5	28.6	26.6	3.4	3.5	2.1	1.6	1.6	1.1
Inhalants	14.2	14.2	13.1	0.7	0.7	1.3	--	--	--
Federal prisoners, 1997									
Any drug[a]	75.2%	75.8%	66.4%	46.0%	46.6%	37.4%	22.6%	23.0%	17.9%
Marijuana/hashish	66.8	67.5	57.2	31.7	32.6	20.1	11.3	11.7	6.0
Cocaine/crack	45.7	46.3	36.9	20.7	21.0	17.1	9.7	10.0	5.8
Heroin/opiates	14.7	14.9	12.2	4.7	4.6	4.7	2.7	2.6	3.4
Depressants[b]	14.8	14.9	13.2	2.9	2.9	3.7	0.9	1.0	0.5
Stimulants[c]	18.3	18.2	18.9	6.7	6.6	8.1	3.4	3.3	5.0
Hallucinogens[d]	17.1	17.4	13.0	1.7	1.7	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.4
Inhalants	6.7	6.9	4.6	0.5	0.5	0.0	--	--	--

Note: Detail adds to more than total because prisoners may have used more than one type of drug.
-- Not reported.
[a]Other unspecified drugs are included in the totals.
[b]Includes barbiturates, tranquilizers, and Quaalude.
[c]Includes amphetamine and methamphetamine.
[d]Includes LSD and PCP.

While similar percentages of fathers (25%) and mothers (23%) in State prison met the criteria for alcohol dependence, fathers were more likely to report other indications of alcohol abuse. A greater share of fathers (37%) than mothers (29%) reported committing their crime while drinking. Fathers in State prison were also more likely than mothers to report driving drunk (49% compared to 36%) and getting into physical fights while drinking (40% and 31%, respectively).

Compared to State prisoners, parents in Federal prison were less likely to be alcohol dependent (16%) or to report committing their offense while drinking (21%). Lower percentages of the parents in Federal facilities also reported alcohol-related fighting (22%) and domestic disputes (30%). As in State prison, fathers in Federal prison were also more likely than mothers to report drunk driving (44% compared to 27%) and alcohol-related physical fights (23% and 14%, respectively).

About 1 in 7 parents in State prison reported indications of a mental illness

In responses to questions regarding mental health, parents in State prison (14%) were twice as likely as those in Federal prison (6%) to report indications of a mental illness (table 12). Inmates were considered mentally ill if they reported either of the following criteria: a current mental or emotional condition or an overnight stay in a mental hospital or treatment program. Reports of a mental illness were somewhat higher among State prisoners without children (19%).

	Percent of State prisoners, 1997	
	Parents	Nonparents
Mentally ill	14.1%	18.7%

Among parents in State prison, 23% of mothers reported an indication of mental illness compared to 13% of fathers. Reports of mental illness indicators were more similar among mothers (10%) and fathers (6%) in Federal facilities.

Nearly 20% of mothers in State prison had been homeless in the year prior to admission

Mothers in State prison (18%) were twice as likely as fathers (8%) to report a period of homelessness in the year prior to admission (table 13). Overall, parents in State prison (9%) were more likely than those in Federal prison (4%) to report being homeless in the year before admission. In Federal facilities, similar percentages of mothers (5%) and fathers (4%) reported periods of homelessness.

In the month prior to their arrest, 29% of parents in State and 27% of parents in Federal prison said that they were unemployed. Half of mothers in State prison were unemployed in the month before their arrest, compared to a quarter (27%) of fathers. The level of unemployment among mothers in Federal prison was lower (38%) but still exceeded that of fathers (26%).

Forty-six percent of the parents in State and 53% of parents in Federal prison reported a personal income of at least $1,000 in the month before

Table 11. Alcohol dependence and experiences of inmate parents in State or Federal prison, by gender, 1997

	Percent of inmate parents, 1997					
	State			Federal		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
History of alcohol dependence*	25.1%	25.3%	23.5%	16.3%	16.6%	12.7%
Under the influence of alcohol at time of current offense	36.7	37.4	28.8	20.7	21.0	16.6
While drinking have you ever —						
Driven a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol?	47.6	48.5	35.7	42.4	43.6	27.1
Had arguments with your spouse, family, or friends?	41.7	41.8	39.5	29.8	30.1	25.3
Gotten into a physical fight?	39.2	39.8	31.3	22.4	23.0	14.3
Had as much as a fifth of liquor in 1 day (20 drinks, 3 six-packs of beer, or 3 bottles of wine)?	41.4	42.3	30.4	29.8	30.6	18.9

*Measured by 3 or more positive CAGE responses.
For a description of the CAGE diagnostic measure see *Methodology*.

Table 12. Mental health status of inmate parents in State or Federal prison, by gender, 1997

	Percent of inmate parents, 1997					
	State			Federal		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Mentally ill*	14.1%	13.4%	22.5%	5.9%	5.6%	10.3%
Reported a mental or emotional condition	8.9	8.3	15.7	3.6	3.2	7.9
Admitted overnight to a mental hospital or treatment program	8.8	8.4	14.1	3.5	3.5	3.8

*Reported either a mental or emotional condition or an overnight stay in a mental hospital or treatment program. See BJS Special Report, *Mental Health and Treatment of Inmates and Probationers*, July 1999, NCJ 174463.

their arrest. Parents in Federal prison (15%) were nearly twice as likely as those in State prison (8%) to report the highest incomes (at least $5,000) in the month before arrest. Mothers in both State (70%) and Federal (66%) prison were more likely than fathers (53% of State, 45% of Federal) to report incomes below $1,000 in the month before arrest.

In the month before their current arrest, nonparents in State prison were less likely than parents to be employed (65%), or to report at least $1,000 of personal income (38%). Nonparents in State prison also reported a higher incidence of homelessness in the past year prior to admission (12%).

	Percent of State prisoners, 1997	
	Parents	Nonparents
Employed during month before current arrest	70.9%	64.8%
Income of at least $1,000 in month before arrest	46.0%	38.2%
Homeless in the past year	9.2%	12.3%

Wages or salary were the most common source of income for parents in both State (66%) and Federal (68%) prison, followed by income from illegal activities (27% of State, 31% of Federal). Eighteen percent of parents in State and 13% in Federal prison reported income from family and friends. Parents in State prison (15%) were more likely than those in Federal prison (9%) to report receiving transfer payments such as welfare, Social Security, or compensation payments. Less than 1% of all parents received child support or alimony payments in the month before arrest.

Among State prisoners, mothers (44%) were less likely than fathers (68%) to receive wages in the month before their arrest, but were more likely to receive transfer payments (42%, compared to 13% of fathers) and income from family or friends (26% and 18%). About 6% of mothers reported receiving child support or alimony payments, compared to less than 0.5% of fathers. Mothers (28%) and fathers (27%) in State prison were equally likely to report income from illegal sources in their final month prior to arrest.

Table 13. Pre-arrest employment, income, and homelessness of inmate parents in State or Federal prison, by gender, 1997

	Percent of inmate parents, 1997					
	State			Federal		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Employment during month before current arrest						
Unemployed	29.1%	27.4%	50.1%	26.5%	25.6%	38.2%
Employed	70.9	72.6	49.9	73.5	74.4	61.8
Full-time	59.0	60.5	39.2	62.7	63.7	49.4
Part-time	9.2	9.2	8.9	8.5	8.4	10.2
Occasional	2.7	2.8	1.8	2.2	2.2	2.1
Personal income in the month before current arrest						
Less than $200	16.5%	16.0%	22.9%	16.5%	16.2%	20.6%
$200-599	20.5	19.9	28.4	14.4	13.8	23.6
$600-999	16.9	16.7	18.7	15.8	15.4	21.6
$1,000-1,999	24.4	25.1	16.7	23.8	24.1	19.4
$2,000-4,999	13.4	13.9	7.7	14.4	14.8	8.2
$5,000 or more	8.2	8.4	5.6	11.1	15.7	6.6
Source of income in month before current arrest[a]						
Wages or salary	66.4%	68.3%	43.6%	67.6%	68.4%	57.1%
Transfer payments[b]	15.4	13.3	41.8	8.8	7.1	33.3
Family/friends	18.4	17.8	26.1	13.3	12.7	22.2
Child support/alimony payments	0.6	0.1	6.5	0.6	0.2	6.3
Illegal sources	27.2	27.1	28.1	30.6	31.1	23.7
Other[c]	3.4	3.4	2.8	6.0	6.1	4.1
Homeless in the past year, living on the street, or in a shelter?	9.2%	8.5%	18.4%	3.8%	3.7%	5.0%

[a]Detail may add to more than 100% because prisoners may have had multiple sources of income.
[b]Includes welfare, Social Security, Supplemental Social Security income, and compensation payments such as unemployment insurance, workman's compensation and Veteran's Compensation.
[c]Includes pensions, educational assistance, investments, and other unspecified types of income.

Methodology

Data in this report are based on personal interviews conducted through the 1997 Surveys of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities. Detailed descriptions of the methodology and sample design of the surveys can be found in the BJS Special Report, *Substance Abuse and Treatment, State and Federal Prisoners, 1997* (NCJ 172871).

Accuracy of the estimates

The accuracy of the estimates in this report depends on two types of error: sampling and nonsampling. Sampling error is the variation that may occur by chance because a sample rather a complete enumeration of the population was conducted. Nonsampling error can be attributed to many sources, such as nonresponses, differences in the interpretation of questions among inmates, recall difficulties, and processing errors. For example, inmates may deny or dispute parenthood and fail to report children. The sampling error, as measured by an estimated standard error, varies by the size of the estimate and the size of the base population.

Appendix tables 1 and 2 contain estimates of the standard errors for selected characteristics of inmate parents that were calculated for each survey. (For other inmate characteristics, please use the generalized standard error estimates presented in the appendix tables of *Substance Abuse and Treatment, State and Federal Prisoners, 1997.*)

The standard errors included in the appendix tables below may be used to construct confidence intervals around percentages. For example, the 95% confidence interval around the percentage of parents in State prison who reported a prior conviction is approximately 77.2% plus or minus 1.96 times 0.62% (or 76.0% to 78.4%).

These standard errors may also be used to test the statistical significance of the difference between two sample statistics by pooling the standard errors of the two sample estimates. For example, the standard error of the difference between mothers and fathers in State prison who were violent offenders would be 1.46% (or the square root of the sum of the squared standard errors for each group). The 95% confidence interval around the difference would be 1.96 times 1.46 (or 2.86%). Since the difference of 19.4% (45.4% minus 26.0%) is greater than 2.86%, the difference would be considered statistically significant.

CAGE diagnostic instrument for alcohol dependence

The CAGE questionnaire is a diagnostic instrument for detecting a person's history of alcohol abuse or dependence. In a clinical test, three or more positive responses to the four CAGE questions carried a .99 predictive value for alcohol abuse or dependence. For further information on the predictive values of the CAGE instrument, see the article "Screening for Alcohol Abuse Using the CAGE Questionnaire" by B. Bush and others, *The American Journal of Medicine*, Vol. 82, February 1987, pp.231-35.

Appendix table 1. Standard errors of selected characteristics of State prisoners with minor children, 1997

Selected characteristic	Percent of State inmate parents, 1997		
	Total	Male	Female
Have minor children*	0.54%	0.58%	1.07%
Lived with children prior to admission	0.73%	0.77%	1.34%
Child's current caregiver			
Child's other parent	0.53%	0.48%	1.26%
Child's grandparent	0.55	0.54	1.40
Foster home/agency	0.23	0.21	0.83
Monthly contact with children			
Any	0.71%	0.76%	1.15%
Phone	0.73	0.77	1.39
Mail	0.73	0.78	1.33
Visits	0.60	0.64	1.19
Current offense			
Violent	0.73%	0.78%	1.23%
Property	0.61	0.64	1.26
Drug	0.63	0.66	1.34
Public-order	0.45	0.48	0.85
Criminal history			
Any priors	0.62%	0.65%	1.34%
Prior substance abuse			
Used drugs in month before offense	0.72%	0.77%	1.33%
Alcohol dependent	0.64	0.68	1.19

*Based on all State prisoners.

Appendix table 2. Standard errors of selected characteristics of Federal prisoners with minor children, 1997

Selected characteristic	Percent of Federal inmate parents, 1997		
	Total	Male	Female
Have minor children*	1.01%	1.08%	2.00%
Lived with children prior to admission	1.31%	1.40%	1.94%
Child's current caregiver			
Child's other parent	0.87%	0.78%	2.45%
Child's grandparent	0.87	0.84	2.64
Foster home/agency	0.30	0.30	0.93
Monthly contact with children			
Any	1.00%	1.09%	1.47%
Phone	1.18	1.27	2.08
Mail	1.26	1.35	2.35
Visits	1.11	1.18	2.10
Current offense			
Violent	0.62%	0.65%	1.81%
Property	0.43	0.43	2.23
Drug	1.40	1.46	5.02
Public-order	0.68	0.71	1.98
Criminal history			
Any priors	1.28%	1.35%	2.51%
Prior substance abuse			
Used drugs in month before offense	1.32%	1.41%	2.58%
Alcohol dependent	0.98	1.05	1.77

*Based on all Federal prisoners.

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The data from the 1997 Surveys of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities are available from the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data, maintained by the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan, 1-800-999-0960. The archive may also be accessed through the BJS Internet site.

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